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Not Watergate Material, Nedzi Says

CIA Is Backed on Tapes

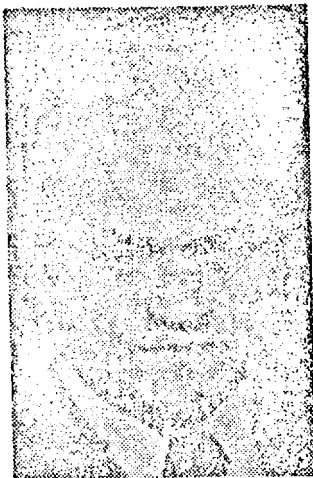
By Laurence Stern

Washington Post Staff Writer

Rep. Lucien Nedzi (D-Mich.) said yesterday he has concluded that no Watergate-related or presidential conversations were destroyed by the Central Intelligence Agency in a major house-cleaning of tape recordings in January, 1973.

Nedzi based his judgment on an examination of a voluminous report, including logs, notes and memoranda, delivered to him yesterday by the CIA.

The Michigan Democrat is the chairman of the House Armed Services Intelligence Subcommittee, which conducted extensive hearings last year into alleged CIA involvement in the Watergate scandal. In a report on the inquiry the subcommittee concluded that the CIA had been duped by high White House aides into providing some assistance for the Watergate cover-up but had no substantive involvement in the affair.



REP. LUCIEN NEDZI
... checked agency logs

In the course of his investigation Nedzi took sworn testimony from dozens of witnesses, including top CIA officials, all the key presidential officials involved in the case and a number of Watergate defendants.

"Someone is trying to blow smoke around," Nedzi

observed of persistent charges on Capitol Hill that the CIA was more deeply implicated in the scandal than has, as yet, been demonstrated in public testimony.

The issue of CIA involvement in Watergate has been a continuing subject of surmise at the highest levels of the administration since the scandal first surfaced in June, 1972.

President Nixon himself acknowledged such a concern motivated him to set in motion White House meetings within a week of the break-in between his two top aides, H. R. (Bob) Halde- man and John D. Ehrlich- man, and former CIA Director Richard Helms and his deputy, Gen. Vernon Wal- ters. The President acknowl- edged, however, in his May 22 Watergate statement that this concern was unfounded.

Sen. Howard H. Baker Jr. (R-Tenn.), cochairman of the Senate Watergate com- mittee, has been the most persistent questioner on Capitol Hill on the question of CIA implication in Water- gate.

In recent weeks he has been interrogating witnesses and seeking to gather evi- dence that might link the agency to the scandal. Such a determination would tend to justify early White House actions which delayed for more than two weeks the Justice Department investi- gation of Nixon re-election funds "laundered" through a Mexican bank.

So far Baker's inquiries into the CIA role have failed to draw any conclu- sive connections. "The animals are crashing around in the forest," he told an inter- viewer recently. "You can hear them but you can't see them."

Nedzi said the new CIA report supplied yesterday does not alter the general conclusions of the subcom- mittee investigation last year.

CIA logs and memos pro- vided yesterday, combined with evidence already be- fore his subcommittee, dem- onstrated that none of the

destroyed tapes bear on Watergate, he said.

CIA officials said that the mass destruction of tapes in mid-January, 1973, was "rou- tine" and prompted by the need to clean out its files. The only prior tape destruc- tions on comparable scale, according to CIA spokesmen, were carried out in 1971 and 1964.

The tapes were destroyed, by one official account, on Jan. 18, one day after the CIA's office of congressional liaison received a letter from Senate Majority Leader Mike Mansfield (D-Mont.) asking the agency to retain all records that might per- tain in any way to Water- gate.

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